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HISTORY IN THE HIGH SCHOOLS¹

As a stranger in your midst, I appreciate your courtesy in inviting me to participate in your deliberations, and to express the opinions of one outside the pale of your ilk, who is interested in this subject only to the extent in which he is interested in the best education of all our young people.

I am not an historian nor a special student of history; neither has this study come within the scope of my teaching experience to any considerable extent, therefore I shall not be charged with the enthusiasm of a specialist, nor with a purpose to exalt a subject that has filled the range of my vision, and produced partial myopia in my intellectual sight. My investigation, correspondence, meditation and most diligent study of the attainments and the power of attainment of very large numbers of pupils of both sexes, have brought to my mind the overwhelming conviction that it is both unreasonable and unjust to set exclusive metes and bounds to secondary and college courses of study, and to withhold a diploma and a degree, until a definite amount of work has been accomplished in a certain prescribed number of compulsory subjects.

I do not mean that any credit should be given for results that are not commensurate with legitimate requirements.

I mean it is not ours to say, just what subjects a young man or woman must take and to just what extent he or she must pursue them, in order that he may be called an educated man.

The proposition, that what is one man's meat is another man's poison, may not be as easily demonstrable in the sphere of the intellectual as in that of the physical, but we believe it is as true nevertheless. High schools and colleges are not established simply to nourish the survival of the fittest, simply to polish what nature has already made brilliant, and to superadd to a

¹ Read before the American Historical Association, Cleveland, Ohio, December 1897.

remarkable intuition of knowlege ; they are not for the Lincolns and the Edisons, but rather are they maintained for the uplifting of the masses, for the polishing of the rough diamonds, and for the truest and best development of those aptitudes and activities which are of divine implanting.

There are many pupils whose mathematical faculty is of such inferior quality, that the most diligent application under the most favorable circumstances, to the study of spherical geometry and differential and integral calculus, would be of little worth either in its reflex influence upon character, in the store of knowledge gained, or the mental grasp acquired. The same may be said of other subjects. What *we* may assimilate may produce intellectual dyspepsia in others. The constituent elements that make their mental muscle vigorous and virile, may superinduce flabbiness and flatulence in us.

I plead therefore for large options in course of instruction ; for a deeper and keener study of child-nature, for a better understanding of the influence of heredity and environment, in the early stages of youth's intellectual unfolding, and for better opportunities of ascertaining the extent and character of those prenatal germs which, if they could be analyzed, would determine for us the kind and quantity of that mental pabulum most conducive to the development of those germs to their highest and richest fruition. We have learned these lessons in botany, in agriculture and in the rearing of the lower animals. We cannot raise oranges in Maine nor build snow forts in Southern California. We do not breed draft horses from fast trotters. In tilling the fields we adapt our seed to our soil, but when we come to the culture of the human intellect, that one element that separates man from the brute, and lifts him into a nearness to the Divine, we act as if all were to be cast in the same mediæval mold, instead of guiding each along the lines of natural selection.

It is time then that the seed sown for ten years by these great associations, which are studying the secondary school problem, should begin to bear fruit in the evolution of such courses of study, as will meet the needs of the individual, and

commend themselves to the warm support of all classes of citizens. To this end then in the larger secondary schools properly equipped, generously maintained, presided over by accomplished and scholarly principals and well trained teachers, I would have a course of study embracing all those subjects, to be continuously taught, which it is advantageous for young people from fourteen to eighteen years of age, who have had good instruction for eight years in the common English branches, to study. Such a course would offer two or three times as much work as any one pupil would be expected to master in a curriculum of four years. It should be rich in language, ancient and modern, with abundant opportunity for English and its literature. Mathematics, history, science should be offered each year. Civics and political economy must receive due attention. In fact every study which the wisdom of the colleges proves to be profitable and practical and disciplinary for pupils of this immature age to study, should find its proper place.

No study should occupy less than one year of four or five periods a week of fifty minutes each for forty weeks. Four studies four periods a week for four years would give sixteen divisions. This would leave but the merest minimum of time for drawing, vocal music, and physical culture, all of which the model secondary school, especially the public school must offer, and the benefits and results of which, together with the time essential to their proper acquirement, the colleges as well as the people should recognize.

If we must give five periods a week to foreign languages, we shall be forced to give but three to English. While I believe three studies five periods a week are better in many respects than four studies four periods a week, yet the demand of the five great departments of study—the five windows of the soul as someone has poetically expressed it—are such, that we can satisfy program makers and college requisites only, by insisting on four studies as a basis. In other words, it will be more satisfactory to omit each once a week than to throw one subject out altogether.

Let me explain my position more clearly by commenting on

the one subject in which this association is particularly and commendably most interested. In passing, however, permit me to be sufficiently bold, even though I may be unpardonably heretical, to say that my experience and observation teach me that our secondary schools should exclude from their curriculum that offensive abortion, now known and dishonored throughout the land, as general history. It is a one year study, and no book containing five or six hundred pages, prepared by the clearest mind, in the best style of English speech, for any year of the high-school course, and which shall be what its title indicates, a general history, will be little more than a general compound of facts, dates and hard names.

The purpose of the study of history in our secondary schools is not, to my mind, to put our pupils in possession of a large number of facts and dates, not to draw on their imagination to the extent of making an effort to conceive the beauty and poetry of a great field of waving, ripening grain, by taking them through acres of dry stubble. It is rather to inculcate a taste for history, to engender a love for historical research, to show pupils how to read, to compare, to contrast, and to draw conclusions; to inspire them with such interest in the philosophy of history, to impart to them such a knowledge of the rise and development, and decay of nations and of governments, to lead them to so study the solution of those great problems that have made national epochs, that they will keep in touch with the stupendous movements of their own age, and understand something of their connection with the inexplicable laws of evolution which are constantly changing society and lifting the world to a higher plane of thought and action. To accomplish even a little of these beneficent results, I believe it is far better for pupils to study the history of one or two nations with such care and thoroughness, that they will, of their own accord if necessary, take up the study of other nations by similar methods.

In this model course of study I would have a place for history in each one of the four years. I would give to the first year Grecian and Roman history, with the understanding that the subject should be developed and its lessons impressed through

the other years, among those pupils who were fortunate enough to select, to enjoy, and to profit by the pursuit of Latin and Greek; in the second year I would place mediæval and modern history, with special reference to France and Germany from 476 A.D.; and these should be still further illumined by the teachers of French and German in the classes of those languages; I would devote the third year to English history, the most important to the pupils in our American schools, next to that of their own country and quite essential to a thorough understanding of the latter, and follow this English history by a systematic study of American history and civics in the fourth year. I am not so crudely optimistic nor so completely self-centered as to expect the American Historical Association to adopt this plan in its entirety; I am rather of that humble mold which would impel me to sit at your feet to learn the when, the what, and the how of the secondary-school historical study, yet I do most fervently hope that this association, representing this cause, and so largely responsible for the place and power which history may have in these colleges of the people, these schools, which, outside of the state universities, represent the highest form of public education, will formulate a report in detail on the subject of history in our secondary schools, and forward it to the national committee on college entrance requirements (with whose chairmanship your speaker is honored), that they may, so far as it can be made practical and adjustable, incorporate it in their final report to the National Educational Association.

Just one thought more, that I may not be misunderstood. I would not require four years of history, either as a condition for a diploma from a high school, or for admission to college. I would, however, dignify and emphasize the value of this study by giving the opportunity to pupils to pursue it four years, with the expectation that all would take it one year, a very large number two years, many three years, and a few four years. Side by side I would place the sciences, and the foreign languages, ancient and modern, the English and mathematics, civics and economics, and to every pupil who could present an honestly authorized statement, or, if you please, pass a satisfactory exam-

ination in accordance with that statement, viz., that he had diligently and successfully pursued a complete course of study for four years in a secondary school of standard excellence, I would give a passport to college, and lead him into that broad highway of learning from which branch those avenues in which he can secure the highest general and specialized education to which his natural and acquired abilities seem to indicate he can best attain.

I am aware that this is not the time for the discussion of this great question, and I do not know whether the representatives of this American Historical Association are particularly interested in it. Yet I am confident that there will be no satisfactory solution of the problem as to the proper place and quantity of history in the secondary schools, until the burning question of wider options in entrance requirements is also settled. I am a young man, yet it is clearly within my memory when no history but the merest modicum of that of the United States was required, and therefore the preparatory schools did not teach it; and for many, many years after Roman and Grecian history found a place in the column of requisites with Latin, Greek, and mathematics, the insistence for this one requirement was merely nominal, and I have heard a distinguished professor of a distinguished university say within a year, that a student can pass the examination test in history by the study of three weeks.

President Eliot, in his recent address at the Worcester Academy, said: "In schools preparatory to college one often finds a primer course in Greek and Roman history in some contracted and despised corner, but for substantial teaching of history one still looks in vain in the great majority of American secondary schools."

There should be no foundation for such statements.

The secondary schools should be encouraged to teach history with the same definiteness of purpose that they have been to teach Latin, Greek, and mathematics. The determination of the colleges to make requirements of admission fixed, limited, absolute, is contrary to the spirit of the age and to the laws of nature, and subversive of the highest interests of education.

To deny a boy or girl the benefits of extended training because, forsooth, he or she is not *en rapport* with ancient languages and solid geometry is not in harmony with the results of psychic research.

In the management of the secondary schools which impart instruction through the delicate and dangerous period of puberty and adolescence, when the nervous organization is at its highest tension, the end, not the means, of education should be kept in view.

Pupils may be taught in classes, but not in masses. The welfare of the individual is the first consideration, and all subjects will receive due attention only when the secondary schools shall be allowed to adopt courses which shall furnish pupils abundant opportunities for the pursuit of those studies which are in the line of their tastes and talents; then will the colleges welcome a class of students better and more uniformly prepared for the researches to which they may be invited, and the nation will have a class of citizens more useful and more contented, with more power to do and to be, although they may not be so thoroughly furnished with what was once essential to a so-called liberal education.

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